

THE HAJJ: IT'S SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Hajj (or pilgrimage to Mecca), is one of the pillars of Islam. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims, belonging to different nationalities and races and drawn from all walks of life, will throng from all parts of the world to worship together at Islam's central mosque and world's most ancient house of worship, the Ka'bah. This celebration and this spectacle, unique in the history of mankind, is repeated year after year and has been in existence for the past more than thirteen (fourteen) centuries. Every conscientious and pious Muslim and Muslimah cherishes the ambition of obtaining the blessings of the Hajj at least once in his or her lifetime. Everyone who has the means and also the requisite religious consciousness strives his utmost to achieve the crown of pilgrimage in spite of the over increasing hurdles and difficulties which beset the path of the pilgrim. In such countries where restrictions on travel for the Hajj and foreign exchange do not exist or exist in a tolerable form, there are persons who earn this virtue every year.

Spiritual Elevation

The Hajj is primarily a devotional institution and, as such, forms the climax of a Muslims' demonstration of devotion to Allah in ceremonial observance.

Slogans, symbols and ceremonies have always formed part of human life on the religious as well as the non-religious plane, whatever the irreligious might think today. They are, however, always the means and not ends-inthemselves. Moreover, their worth and efficacy always depends on the ideas and concepts they sub-serve. They may form the projection of meaningless whims and mythical fancies, or they may be the representations of great and

noble and true ideals.

While, therefore, symbols, ceremonies and slogans are to be found in Islam, as naturally they should have been, they are strictly rational and sublime in contrast to the irrational and even debasing ceremonies of other religions.

As a spiritual ceremonial observance, the Hajj should be understood in this light. Each one of the ceremonies performed by the pilgrim during the Hajj is rich in connotation and carries within its bosom the attainment of a well-defined spiritual "idea". Thus, when the pilgrim goes round the Ka'bah in the performance

of the prescribed number of tawaafs, bareheaded, covered in a seamless unsewn garb, and, like a mad lover, absorbed in the contemplation of his beloved - of his Creator he demonstrates his advance from the common level of human life to a higher state of spiritual glory wherein he affirms his relation to Allah. Similar is the case with other ceremonies.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him, his family and companions, and give them peace) has emphasized the immense importance of the Hajj in the task of spiritual reformation and transformation. But only those who perform it intelligently and conscientiously and with full understanding and the requisite accompanying spiritual endeavor can earn the spiritual benefits in full measure. The Hajj is a milestone in the Muslim spiritual life and should be treated as such.

Affirmation Of Human Equality And Brotherhood

Islam is not a "personal religion" like some salvation-faiths. It is the religion of society. Its function is to reform, transform and build up not only the individual but the entire social whole. In fact, Islam is the religion of society to an extent that even its purely devotional institutions have definite social implications and functions. Take, for instance, the case of prayer which is perhaps the most "personal" and "private" of all religious institutions. In Islam, prayer has its social function as emphatic as the spiritual or devotional. The mosque is the only place in the world where the ideal of human

brotherhood is truly and correctly and practically realized, where all distinctions of race and rank and colour and caste are obliterated. And in that rehearsal of the affirmation of human brotherhood, a Muslim has to participate obligatorily five times every day.

Islam does not, however, confine its struggle for the practical establishment of human brotherhood to that. From the local daily congregations to the more comprehensive Friday congregation, and from the city-congregation to the world-congregation at Mecca on the occasion of the Hajj, it progressively enlarges the scope and function of that rehearsal and that affirmation, until it achieves for the Muslim society what it has been impossible for other societies to achieve, viz. perfect human equality and brotherhood. "The ideal of a League of Human Races" ,says Islam's hostile critic, Professor Snouck Hungronje, "has indeed been approached by Islam more nearly than any other religion; for the League of Nations founded on the basis of Muhammad's religion takes the principle of the equality of all human races so seriously as to put other communities to shame."

May Allah enable the Muslims to raise this torch of human brotherhood higher and higher as time passes by! Ameen!